

Rutherford County Government
Social Media Policy, Guidelines, & Acknowledgement Form

These are the official guidelines for social media at Rutherford County Government. This policy applies to every *employee, volunteer, or contractor*, whether part-time or full-time, currently employed by the County in any capacity who posts any material whether written, audio, video or otherwise on any website, blog or any other medium accessible via the Internet. It also applies to every official, whether part time or full time, currently holding County office who posts any such material in their official capacity or in a manner that is reasonably deemed to be in their official capacity. It is recommended that employees refrain from making “impulse comments” when on these sites. We expect all who participate in social media on behalf of Rutherford County Government to be trained, to understand, and to follow these guidelines. Failure to do so could put your future participation at risk. These guidelines will continually evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge – so check back regularly to make sure you are up to date.

DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this policy, "social media" is content created by individuals using accessible and scalable technologies through the Internet. Examples of social media include but are not limited to: Facebook, blogs, MySpace, RSS, YouTube, Second Life, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Google Wave.

Blog: A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions or comments. The term is short for "Web log".

Page: The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by one or more persons with administrator rights.

Post: Content a person shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.

Profile: Personal information that a user provides on a social networking site.

Social Media: A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, Myspace), microblogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo and video sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube), wikis (Wikipedia), and blogs and news sites (Digg, Reddit).

Social Networks: Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.

Speech: Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, video or related forms of communication.

Web 2.0: The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on sharable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. This term may be used interchangeably with social media.

Wiki: Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

This policy shall be applied only to the extent permitted by and in a manner consistent with the United States and Tennessee constitutions. Unless specifically instructed, employees are not authorized and therefore restricted to speak on behalf of the County. Employees may not publicly discuss employees or any work-related matters, whether confidential or not, outside the County-authorized communications; communications are based upon the employee's role and/or positions within the county. Employees are expected to protect the privacy, non-public information, of the County and its employees and are prohibited from disclosing personal employee and non-employee information and any other proprietary and nonpublic information to which employees have access. Any conduct that would be deemed illegal or a violation of the County's Social Media Policy “offline” will still be illegal “online”.

RULES AND GUIDELINES

The County maintains an online presence. An official or employee may not characterize himself or herself as representing the County at any time, including non-working or personal time, directly or indirectly, in any online posting unless pursuant to the written policies of the County.

All County social media sites directly or indirectly representing that they are an official site or statement of the County must be created pursuant to this policy and be approved by the department director or other designee. The County's primary and predominant Internet presence shall remain www.rutherfordcountyttn.gov and no other website, blog or social media site shall characterize itself as being the County's primary or home Internet site.

Before any County social media site is created, the department head must submit a written request to the County Mayor and the Director of Information Technology must approve that request and file it within the Office of Information Technology and Human Resources. The request shall specify the reasons for the request and describe the type of information to be provided and the persons within the department who will be responsible for the content and the upkeep of the social media site created or maintained pursuant to the request.

Whenever possible, a social media site of the County shall link or otherwise refer visitors to the County's main website. Social media pages should state that the opinions expressed by the visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of Rutherford County Government.

In addition to this policy, all County social media sites shall comply with all applicable County policies and state laws dealing with County publications.

County employees shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information they have access to as a result of their employment without written permission from their Elected Official or Director.

Any negative comments, posts, or concerns should be communicated directly to the appropriate department head prior to being posted on the Internet.

Employees should be aware that all Internet posts are widely accessible and should therefore use discretion when choosing to share their own personal or medical information online.

A County social media site shall also contain a clear and conspicuous statement that the purpose of the site is to serve as a mechanism for communication between the County and its citizens and that all postings are subject to review by the County. The following content is not allowed and may be immediately removed:

- Comments not topically related to the particular social medium article being commented upon;
- Comments in support of or opposition to political campaigns or ballot measures;
- Comments concerning legal matters involving the County or anyone employed or affiliated with the County;
- Comments that are unsubstantiated, false or libelous;
- Profane language or content;
- Content that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or other legally protected classification or category;
- Sexual content or links to sexual content;
- Content that gives personal information including health information;

- Solicitations of commerce;
- Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity;
- Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems; or
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party.

Posting of content prohibited under this policy may subject the poster to banishment from all County social media sites in addition to civil and/or criminal penalties under federal and/or state law.

The County will approach the use of social media tools, software, hardware, and applications in a manner which is consistent with all the County guidelines. All new tools, software, hardware, and applications must be approved by the Director of Information Technology or their approved designee.

For each social media tool or site approved for use in accordance with this policy, operational and use guidelines, design or "branding" standards, and processes for managing the account shall be developed and documented in writing. The County must be able to immediately edit or remove content from its social media sites.

PERSONAL BLOGS and SOCIAL NETWORKING ACTIVITIES

The County respects the right of employees to use blogs and social networking sites as a medium of self-expression and public conversation and does not discriminate against employees who use these media for personal interests and affiliations or other lawful purposes. Employees are expected to follow the guidelines and policies set forth to provide a clear line between you as the individual and you as the employee.

Bloggers and commenters are personally responsible for their commentary on blogs and social networking sites. Bloggers and commenters can be held personally liable for commentary that is considered defamatory, obscene, proprietary or libelous by any offended party, not just Rutherford County Government.

Employees cannot use employer-owned equipment, including computers, software or other electronic equipment, nor facilities or County time, to conduct personal blogging or social networking activities.

Employees cannot use blogs or social networking sites to harass, threaten, discriminate or disparage against other employees or anyone associated with or doing business with the County even during non-working hours.

If contacted by the media or press about their post that relates to County business, employees are required to contact the Mayor's office along with their supervisor before responding.

When posting in a non-official capacity on a non-County site, an official or employee shall not unnecessarily identify themselves as an official or employee of the County. However, an official or employee does not violate this policy by stating the type of position held and the employer's name as basic identifying information, e.g. opening a Facebook account. When the identity of an official or employee posting in a non-County social media site is apparent, the employee or official shall clearly state that he or she is posting in a private and/or unofficial capacity and his or her statements do not reflect the opinions of the County nor are they speaking on behalf of the County.

The use of a County email address, job title, uniform, official County name, seal, logo or letterhead shall be deemed an attempt to represent the County in an official capacity. Other communications leading an average viewer to conclude that a posting was made in an official capacity shall also be deemed an attempt to represent the County in an official capacity.

Elected Officials and Directors may allow or disallow employee participation in non-County social media activities as part of their job duties in accordance with this policy and rules and guidelines developed hereunder.

Postings made in an official capacity shall be subject to the Tennessee Public Records Act, including any official postings on a non-County social media site.

An official or employee posting on a social media site shall take reasonable care not to disclose any confidential information or non-public information in any posting (e.g. another employee's personal identifying information).

OPEN MEETINGS ACT

No official of the County shall use a County owned or created social media site or a non-County social media site to discuss or deliberate any matter with another County official when such communication is or could reasonably be deemed to be in violation of the Open Meetings Act, T.C.A. §8-44-101 et seq., commonly known as "the Sunshine Law".

If you have any questions relating to this policy, your personal blog, or social networking, ask the Director of Information or Human Resources.

WHEN YOU USE

Emerging platforms for online collaboration are fundamentally changing the way we work, offering new ways to engage with customers, colleagues, and the world at large. It's a new model for interaction and we believe social computing can help you to build stronger, more successful business relationships. And it's a way for you to take part in national and local conversations related to the work we are doing at Rutherford County Government and the things we care about.

If you participate in social media, please follow these guiding principles:

- Stick to your area of expertise and provide unique, individual perspectives on what's going on in Rutherford County Government and in the world.
- Post meaningful, respectful comments – in other words, no spam, no off-topic remarks, and no offensive remarks.
- Always pause and think before posting. However, do reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
- Respect proprietary information, content, and confidentiality.
- When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.
- Negative comments or concerns should be expressed to your Department Head prior to posting. Don't be public until you have been private.
- Know and follow the Rutherford County Social Media Policy.

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Be Transparent. Your honesty – or dishonesty – will be quickly noticed in the social media environment. If you are blogging about your work at Rutherford County Government, use your real name, identify that you work for Rutherford County Government, and be clear about your role. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. Transparency is about your identity and relationship to Rutherford County Government. You still need to keep confidentiality in mind during your communication.

Be judicious. Make sure your efforts to be transparent don't violate the Rutherford County Government privacy, confidentiality, and legal guidelines for external speech. Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal to Rutherford County Government. All statements must be true and not misleading and all claims must be substantiated and approved. Please never comment on anything related to legal matters. If you want to write about the competition, make sure you know what you are talking about and that you have the appropriate permission. Also be smart protecting yourself, your privacy, and Rutherford County Government information. What you publish is widely accessible and you should assume it will be there forever.

Write what you know. Make sure you write and post about your areas of expertise, especially as related to Rutherford County Government. Write in the first person. Deal only in factual information and first-hand knowledge. If you publish to a website outside of Rutherford County Government, please use a disclaimer. For example, "The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent Rutherford County Government positions or opinions." Also, please respect confidentiality and financial disclosure laws. If you have any questions about these, see your Rutherford County Government legal representative. Remember, you may be personally responsible for your content.

Perception is reality. In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as a Rutherford County Government employee, you are creating perceptions about your experience and about Rutherford County Government by our customers, the general public, and your colleagues. Do us all proud. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with Rutherford County Government's values and professional standards.

It's a conversation. Talk to your readers like you would talk to real people in professional situations. In other words, avoid overly "composed" language. Don't be afraid to bring in your own personality and say what's on your mind. Consider content that is open-ended and invites response. Encourage comments. You can also broaden the conversation by citing others who are blogging about the same topic and allowing your content to be shared or syndicated.

Are you adding value? There are millions of words out there. The best way to get yours read is to write things that people will value. Social communication from Rutherford County Government should help our customers, community, and co-workers. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community. If it helps people improve knowledge or skills, do their jobs, solve problems, or understand government services and Rutherford County Government better – then it is adding value.

Your Responsibility. What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Participation in social computing on behalf of Rutherford County Government is not a right but an opportunity, so please treat it seriously and with respect. If you want to participate on behalf of Rutherford County Government, contact your Rutherford County Human Resources Department. Failure to abide by the Rutherford County Government Social Media Policy could put your participation at risk. Please also follow the terms and conditions for any third-party sites.

Be a Leader. There can be a fine line between healthy debate and incendiary reaction. Do not denigrate Rutherford County Government. Nor do you need to respond to every criticism or barb. Try to frame what you write to invite differing points of view without inflaming others. Some topics – like politics or religion – slide more easily into sensitive territory. So be careful and considerate. Once the words are out there, you can't really get them back. And once an inflammatory discussion gets going, it's hard to stop.

Did you make a mistake? If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. If you are posting to a blog, you may choose an earlier post – just make it clear that you have done so. If it gives you pause, pause. If you are about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send'. Take a minute to review these guidelines and try to figure out what is

bothering you, then fix it. If you are still unsure, you might want to discuss it with your manager or legal representative. Ultimately, what you publish is yours – as is the responsibility. So be sure.

CONTRACTORS & ENDORSEMENTS

Rutherford County Government supports transparency. We are committed to ensuring that our social media practitioners (including blogs, Facebook, Twitter, forums, and any other social media) clearly disclose relationships and endorsements, and that statements about Rutherford County Government are truthful and substantiated.

MODERATION GUIDELINES

Moderation is the act of reviewing and approving content before it is published on the site. While we strongly encourage user participation, there are some guidelines we ask you to follow to keep it safe for everyone.

Pre-moderation. Even when a site requires the user to register before posting, simple user name and email entry doesn't really validate the person. So to ensure least risk/most security, we require moderation of all posts before they are published.

Balanced online dialogue. Please follow these principles: If the content is positive or negative and in context to the conversation, then we approve the content, regardless of whether it's favorable or unfavorable to Rutherford County Government. But if the content is ugly, offensive, denigrating, and completely out of context, then we reject the content.

MONITORING

Employees are cautioned that they should have no expectation of privacy while using the Internet at work or on work equipment. The Rutherford County Employee Handbook defines the technology expectations and rules in more detail. Your postings can be reviewed by anyone, including the County. The County reserves the right to monitor comments or discussions about the County and its employees posted on the Internet by anyone, including employees and non-employees. The County uses search tools and software to monitor forums such as blogs and other types of personal journals, diaries, personal and business discussion forums, and social networking sites. Employees are cautioned that they should have no expectation of privacy while using the County equipment, facilities or networks for any purpose, including authorized blogging. The County reserves the right to use content management tools to monitor, review, block, or remove content on the County blogs that violate the County blogging rules and guidelines.

REPORTING VIOLATIONS

The County requests and strongly urges employees to report any violations or perceived violations to Elected Officials, Directors, Human Resources department of Rutherford County Government or the abuse and fraud hotline. Violations include discussions of Rutherford County and its employees, any discussion of proprietary information and any unlawful activity related to blogging or social networking.

DISCIPLINE FOR VIOLATIONS

The County investigates and responds to *all* reports of violations of the social networking policy and other related policies. Violation of the County's social networking policy will result in disciplinary action up to and including immediate termination. Discipline or termination will be determined based on the nature and factors of any blog or social networking post. The County reserves the right to take legal action where necessary against employees who engage in prohibited or unlawful conduct.

EXCEPTION PROCESS

If a position requires the use of Internet in order to perform essential job functions, an exception may be made on an individual basis. Exceptions to this policy must be requested in writing to your Elected Official or Director, and the request will be escalated to the County Mayor and the Director of Information Technology. Exceptions will be documented in writing and retained according to existing retention schedules. Exceptions may be granted on a limited-time basis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Employees are required to sign a written acknowledgement that they have received, read, understood and agreed to comply with the County's social networking policy and any other related policy and that implications of comments today and in the future could result to and include discharge.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have received a copy, either physically or electronically, of the Rutherford County Social Media Policy and Guidelines. I have read and understand the policy so that I know my rights and responsibilities as an employee of Rutherford County Government. I also understand that I am expected to follow the policy and may contact Office of Information Technology or Human Resources if I need additional information about this or any other policy or procedure of Rutherford County Government. I understand that the County has the right to modify, delete, or improve any of the policies or guidelines at any time with or without notice. It is understood that future changes in policies and guidelines will supersede or eliminate those found in this policy and guidelines and that employees will be notified of such changes through normal communication channels. I understand that the changes will apply to me regardless of whether I receive actual notice. All information contained in the policies is subject to applicable State, Federal, and Local laws, rules, and regulations. I understand that to the extent that any such laws may conflict with any provision of the policies, such laws, rules, and regulations will control.

I acknowledge that none of the County's policies may be construed to create a contract of employment or any other legal obligation, express or implied, and that any policy may be amended, revised, supplemented, rescinded or otherwise altered, in whole or in part, at any time, at the sole and absolute discretion of Rutherford County.

Employee Signature

Date

Employee Printed Name

Department